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JERUSALEM AND THEREABOUTS.

By the REVEREND A. K. PARKER, D.D.,
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AT the Jaffa gate of Jerusalem western travelers in general part with certain illusions, equipped with which they have journeyed thus far. The atmosphere of the holy city is not conducive to spiritual fervors, nor do its everyday scenes feed the noblest emotions of the soul. Here, to begin with, as we stand at the top of that long descent of shallow stone stairs, dignified by the name of David Street, an ecclesiastical procession is advancing, and we step into a shop doorway to allow the Latin Bishop to pass. His reverence, if he be not entitled to a much more august appellation, is returning in full pontificals to his palace from some high function at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, attended by an imposing array of gorgeous mace-bearers, vested priests and brown-frocked monks, and further honored by a swaggering escort of Turkish soldiers. "The Bishop must be protected, yes," explains the nonchalant dragoon, "it is near Holy Week, when always there is much quarreling between the Latins and the Greeks." Here, again, in the doorway of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre itself, lounges the Turkish military guard, ready for prompt and impartial interference if Latin and Greek worshipers fall into dispute for the ten thousandth time over the infringement of some petty privilege, and fly, like wild beasts, at each others' throats.

If the plain truth must be spoken, the Jerusalem of today is a sordid and depressing Oriental town, which has little or nothing to tell the visitor of the memorable and glorious periods of its past history. Its most notable buildings, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the mosques within the Haram esh Sherif enclosure, possess, it is true, an incomparable interest, but it is to the antiquarian, the artist, and the historian that they

make their strongest appeal. One may sometimes meet the heroic figure of Godfrey of Bouillon under the mediæval archways of these narrow streets, but never Jesus of Nazareth. We must go outside the walls if we would set our feet in the pathways he trod.

The long ridge of the Mount of Olives, rising as it does 200 feet above the hills upon which the city stands, and separated



STREET OF STAIRS

from its walls only by the narrow Kedron valley, is perpetually challenging the attention as one walks the city streets. Its green slopes are dotted with groups of gray olive trees, and crossed by steep and narrow footpaths. Here and there a solitary building stands out, offensively conspicuous among them the new Russian church with its Byzantine domes, and the roofs of a little village rise above its summit. It is unwallled, open, free of access. But Olivet keeps yet its aspect of seclusion. It

is very near Jerusalem, seeming literally to overhang it, and, at the same time, very remote from its paltry traffic, its mean ecclesiastical squabbles, and its bedizened holy places. One breathes more freely upon its slopes, and takes courage in the shadow of its olive trees to open the New Testament. It is easy to realize that here Jesus sat in meditation, looking out upon the snowy marble and glittering gold of the Temple terraces and walls, when the troubled disciples found him out, saying "Tell us when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming?" Through this valley of graves just below us, crossing the brook Kedron he came, as the sun was setting, on the evening of Sunday, and again on Monday and on Tuesday of Passion Week, and set his face to climb the hill toward Bethany. The Jerusalem of our Lord's time is buried deep under the rubbish accumulations of centuries, but one ventures to think that if he walked again on earth this green hillside would wear to him a not unfamiliar aspect.

We visited the Mount of Olives first in the afternoon of Palm Sunday; and riding in the direction of Bethany far enough to lose sight of the city altogether, turned back upon the road running around the southern shoulder of the hill by which mounted travelers coming from Jericho and Bethany must always have approached Jerusalem. Nothing can be more exact in detail than Dean Stanley's famous description of this spot. As we pushed eagerly on, the city walls appeared for a moment, and were lost to sight. The road descends, and mounts again to a little platform where the rider checks his horse, surprised, so suddenly does it break upon him, by the very picture he was expecting to see. There, before him, hardly a stone's throw distant, as it seems, stretched out in the brilliant sunshine upon its broken hills and shut in by its useless walls, lies the gray, ruinous, melancholy city of David; and just here—it is hardly possibly to doubt it—David's Son stood, and beholding splendid and proud Jerusalem wept over it. Hardly another locality in or about Jerusalem, associated with the gospel narrative, is less open to controversy than this. The Greek and the Latin churches have each its own Garden of Gethsemane. The Dome of the Rock in the enclosure

of the Haram esh Sherif covers the site of the ancient altar of burnt offering, one party confidently affirms. Another party is equally positive that this mysterious cave is the very tomb which Joseph of Arimathea surrendered for the burial of Jesus. The Protestant world, with few exceptions, scouts the claim that the shrines enclosed within the walls of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre mark the sites of the crucifixion and the entombment of our Lord. We may choose between two or three plausible identifications of Calvary outside the walls of the city. Certainty regarding these matters as yet there is none; though it is not unreasonable to expect that the explorations of the future will tell us beyond a doubt where Herod's Temple stood and where the three crosses were set up. Meanwhile the devout spirit, seeking the places which knew the Christ, will gladly turn away from the candle-stained gloom of churches, heavy with incense odors, to the wide and sunny and quiet spaces of the Mount of Olives.

“The pathways of thy land are little changed
Since Thou wert there;
The busy world through other ways has ranged,
And left these bare—

The rocky path still climbs the glowing steep
Of Olivet,
The rains of two millenniums wear it deep;
Men tread it yet.

The wild fig throws broad shadows o'er it still,
As once o'er Thee;
Peasants go home at evening up that hill
To Bethany.

And as, when gazing, Thou didst weep o'er them,
From height to height
The white roofs of discrowned Jerusalem
Burst on our sight.

It was on Palm Sunday afternoon also that we saw the Garden of Gethsemane, a quiet spot at the foot of Olivet, and somewhat removed from the road which here begins the ascent of the hill. A high stone wall encloses the irregular quadrangle with its seven venerable olive trees, their rugged trunks showing in

yawning rents the marks of great age. About each tree is built a wooden paling with a locked gate, a necessary precaution, if the trees are not to be stripped by ruthless pilgrims of the last tiny twig and leaf. The Latin church has possession of the little garden; and the Franciscan monks in charge are very courteous to visitors. There is no entrance fee, but if you would carry away



OLIVE TREE IN GETHSEMANE

two or three flowers of the purple and yellow heart's-ease which brighten the carefully kept garden beds, a bit of silver will procure them and the good father will slip your offering into his pocket, saying, "It is for the poor." On the inner side of the enclosing wall sacred pictures are hung at intervals, marking "stations for prayer," and in the fragrant air, and sunshine of that quiet Sunday afternoon a little company of worshipers, with a priest at the head, was making the rounds of these stations, kneeling a

moment at each to chant a prayer. Very sweet and very solemn rose upon the stillness the plaintive minor of the repeated refrain of the litany, "O Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world, have mercy on us!"

No conceivable credulity can accept these olives as the identical trees beneath which our Lord prayed. But it is very likely that the Garden of the Oil Press was hereabouts; and the tradition which fixes upon this spot goes back to the fourth century. The Romish church gently protects, but she does not invade the peace of the garden; and one sympathizes, when he turns away

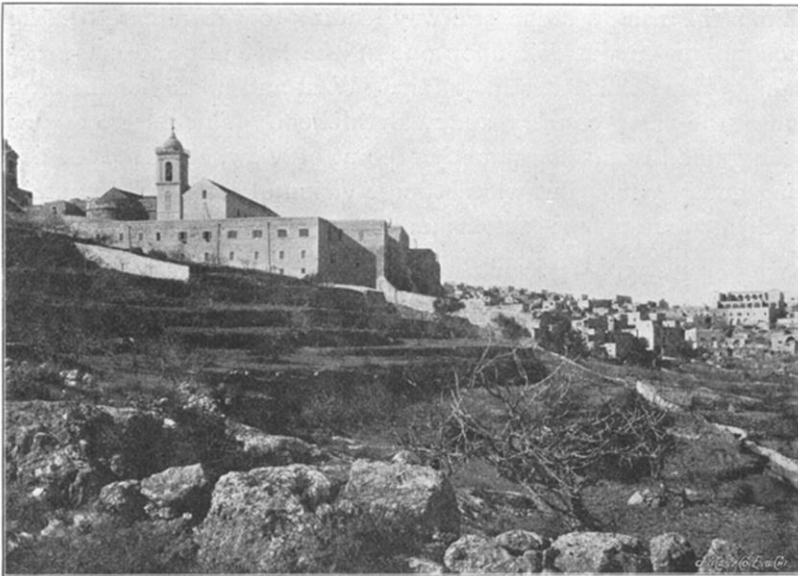
from the reputed Gethsemane, with that traveler who says that "he chooses rather to believe in its authenticity than to defend it."

Shall we leave the Mount of Olives without visiting the church of the Ascension? The mosque of the Ascension it should rather be called, for here is a "holy place" to which Christians, Latin, Greek, and Armenian alike, come to say masses by the gracious permission of their Mohammedan masters. Church and mosque stand side by side in the center of an enclosed court. Climb the narrow stone stairway leading to the minaret of the mosque for an outlook upon one of the loveliest and most surprising views that Palestine offers. West and north lies the city, south the hilly country about Bethlehem. This prospect has been gained from many another point of view, and it does not long detain you. But what strange vision of lake and mountain is this, greeting the astonished eyes as one looks eastward? You turn to your guide in bewilderment. That stretch of waveless deep blue water lying yonder, only a few hundred feet below, it seems, and easily reached in a half hour's walk, you hardly venture to ask the question, but is it, can it be, the Dead Sea? It can be nothing else, certainly; but it is nearly four thousand feet below our level, and a ride of seven hours would hardly bring us to it. The marvelous purity of the atmosphere is the magician's wand that has brought the Dead Sea to our feet, and set dim Nebo just before us rising above that deep chasm in the blue boundary wall of the mountains of Moab.

Next to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the most famous shrine of Palestine, or indeed, of the world, is the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem. The city itself lies upon the spur of a hill, a long irregular line of closely packed houses of mud and stone, surrounded by terraced vineyards and orchards of olive trees and figs, and presenting as its most conspicuous object, an enormous shapeless building, in which church and convent are inextricably combined. It is not easy, even when one stands at its gate, to disentangle its parts, and say where church begins and convent ends.

Of the three doorways in the façade of the Church of the

Nativity, two have been built up and the third reduced in size, that the interior might be more easily protected against Mohammedan assaults, a precaution, happily, now no longer necessary. Through this low and narrow door one enters the oldest Christian church in the world. The Empress Helena reared these walls and Constantine consecrated them to Christian worship. Justinian restored and enriched the church. And it has been marvelously preserved since from Saracenic fury, and Mohammedan desecra-



BETHLEHEM AND THE LATIN CONVENT

tion. The pointed wooden roof of the nave is of English oak, by which King Edward IV. replaced the decaying beams of the original construction of cedar of Lebanon. On either side of the wide nave are two aisles, with forty-four columns in all, noble monolith shafts of rose-colored marble, with each a cross engraven upon its capital. Faint traces of the mosaics with which the walls were once adorned are visible, and from the ceiling, both of the nave and the aisles, hang silver lamps, curiously decorated with ostrich eggs. Looking down the long

nave, the eye is arrested by an ugly brick wall rising as high as the capitals of the columns, and cutting off completely the transept, an inexcusable and shabby defacement, recently built by the Greeks. This nobly proportioned, simple and severe interior is entirely wanting in the customary apparatus of Greek and Romish worship, such as chapels, altars, images, pictures, candles, votive offerings. Among the lovely marble pillars, sole



GHURGH OF NATIVITY

occupants of the vast and unadorned space of the church, one may wander at will, as though strolling through a grove; an immunity and privilege to be gratefully enjoyed.

Passing through the disfiguring wall at the extremity of the nave, we find ourselves in a richly decorated Greek church, with its altar and gorgeous bishop's throne, with pictures upon the walls and gigantic candlesticks supporting candles as thick as one's arm. Masses are being said, and barefooted monks with brown frocks girdled with a rope patter over the stone floor.

But this gaudy church is not what we have come to see. Near the great altar a flight of steps leads to an arched doorway. Down these steps and through this door, a monk with a lighted candle leads us into an underground chapel, forty feet long, twelve feet wide, ten feet high. It is in fact a natural cave, paved and lined with marble, with costly glimmering lamps suspended from its ceiling. At the extremity of the chapel is a



FIELD OF BOAZ, NEAR BETHLEHEM

semi-circular recess, and into its marble pavement a silver star is sunk, around which runs this inscription: *Hic de Virgine Maria Jesus Christus natus est.* That the stable of the Bethlehem inn where Joseph and Mary found refuge was a cave, is not unlikely. That this particular recess in the rock, adorned with pictures and protected from relic hunters by a wire grating, is the very manger in which the infant Jesus was laid is not impossible. The tradition is a very ancient one, and those who are not prepared

to accept it are contented at least not to challenge it. We felt no overpowering rush of emotion as we looked down upon the silver star which a stream of pilgrims devoutly kiss; nor, on the other hand, could we speak lightly of the credulity and superstition of these devotees. It is something more than a bigoted Protestant prejudice which forbids true religious emotions as one stands beside shrines vulgarized by tinsel finery. The mind contends helplessly against a sense of unreality. We too, like the pilgrims whom we were inclined to envy, might have knelt devoutly in the cave of the Church of the Nativity if the marble casing could have been torn from the rock, if the votive lamps could have been removed, if the clinging odors of incense could have been purged away. But over these barriers it was hard to climb; and yet it may have been just here that "the heaven-born child, all meanly wrapt, in the rude manger lay."

Leaving the church, we walked through the long street of the town, and then by a narrow cross lane reached the summit of a hill and looked off upon a wide sweep of encircling pastures and grain fields. Nowhere in southern Palestine is there more careful cultivation than is found just about Bethlehem, and nowhere are the field flowers more abundant and more brilliant. "Yonder," said the dragoman, pointing to a little clump of olive trees in the plain below, "is the field where the shepherds were feeding their flocks when the angels appeared." The exact spot does not matter. These are the green cornfields and pasture lands of the House of Bread, and up this hill and down this narrow street the wandering shepherds hurried to find it even so as the angel had said unto them. Once more it is in the open air, and not under consecrated roofs, that the gospel story becomes real. Let illusions go. The Holy Land is eloquent still to him who has ears to hear.